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SUBJECT: HOLY SEE: POPE TO EMPHASIZE FAMILY VALUES IN SPAIN

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REASON: 1.4 (d)

Summary

¶11. (C) In advance of Pope Benedict XVI's July 8 departure for Valencia, Spain for the World Meeting of Families, Post spoke to the Holy See and to Spanish representation to the Vatican. Vatican officials acknowledged to us that issues such as relaxed regulations on divorce, embryonic stem cell research, recognition of same-sex marriage, and approval of homosexual adoption have caused some tension between the Holy See and the Zapatero government. They said the pope would raise these issues as they relate to Spain only in private bilateral meetings, though the more general remarks on the same would obviously have implications for the Spanish context. Spanish DCM Luis Belzuz (protect) reported that the Holy See requested that Spain try to keep a low profile on protests or other controversy while the pope was in Valencia. He claimed that while the Zapatero government had taken some radical positions on "family issues" it now wants to move toward the center. This may have helped relations with the Vatican, he concluded. All told, Belzuz said Spain sees the papal visit as an opportunity for improved relations. This will be a significant trip for Pope Benedict, as he picks his spots for travel very carefully. In traveling to Spain he has a chance to impact two of his key goals: bolstering the traditional family, and encouraging a traditionally Catholic country to stay true to the faith. End Summary.

World Meeting of Families

¶12. (SBU) Pope Benedict XVI heads to Valencia, Spain on July 8 to close the fifth World Meeting of Families. He will use this opportunity to bring his message of uncompromising support for the traditional family and Catholic values to Spain, a country that has ruffled the Vatican's feathers with recent movement on "family and life issues." Though the trip is not focused on bilateral relations, the pope will meet privately with King Juan Carlos and Prime Minister Zapatero while in Spain.

Holy See Thinking

¶3. (C) Monsignor Paolo Gualtieri, Country Director for Spain at the Holy See's foreign ministry, acknowledged to us that issues such as relaxed regulations on divorce, embryonic stem cell research, recognition of same-sex marriage, and approval of homosexual adoption have caused some tension between the Holy See and the Zapatero government. Though the GOS position on these issues will not be a focus of public remarks by the pope, Gualtieri told us that Benedict will certainly raise these matters privately. "The purpose of the visit is pastoral" said Gualtieri; "the Holy Father will address issues confronting the family in their universal context." Gualtieri nonetheless conceded that the sociopolitical context in Spain would make the implications of the pope's comments clear.

Spanish DCM

¶4. (C) DCM spoke with his Spanish counterpart Luis Belzuz (protect) about the visit; following comments are drawn from this conversation:

-- The Holy See is very satisfied with the organizational arrangements. Benedict will be in town about 24 hours over two days. The pope will call on the king, then receive the prime minister. The Holy See requested that Spain keep a low profile; in particular, asking that protests by, say, homosexual groups during the Family Week not occur when the pope is actually present.

-- Cardinals Lopez Trujillo (President of the Pontifical Council for the Family and outspoken conservative) and Secretary of State Cardinal Sodano met the Spanish and Latin American ambassadors to the Holy See (in a group) recently; Lopez Trujillo was uncharacteristically "mild" and assured those

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present that papal statements made in Spain would be of a general nature and about the family -- i.e. not singling out Spain for any criticism.

-- Ironically, the visit was initially arranged three years ago, when former Prime Minister Aznar was at his peak. Circumstances have of course changed, with well-known difficulties between the Holy See and Spain occurring as a result. The Zapatero government had taken some radical positions (Belzuz likened them to what MP Emma Bonino would endorse here in Italy); but now wants to move toward the center. This may have some soothing effect on neuralgic issues with the church, such as gay marriage. The Vatican is aware of, and welcomes, this shift.

-- The GOS is hoping that First Vice Prime Minister Maria Teresa Fernandez de la Vega will get a higher profile; she's been in Rome twice recently, first for a "half-secret" visit, then in a semipublic visit (perhaps with Cardinal Sodano); this is important for Madrid.

-- The Spanish church is deeply divided on tactics in dealing with the government; some hard-line bishops are very vocal against it, but many others are opposed to such an overt approach.

-- The Zapatero government is working on two main issues important to Spanish church organizationally -- religious education in schools, and financing of churches -- and expects a resolution by this fall.

-- All told, Spain sees the papal visit as opportunity. The government was very happy with Benedict's statement a few months ago in support of the Spanish peace process with ETA; this is high priority for Zapatero and the Holy See understands its importance too. Papal statements remain hugely influential in Spain, even with ETA (which got its start in universities and seminaries and was launched by students affiliated with PNV, itself founded as a conservative Catholic entity).

-- There are no plans at present for a Zapatero visit to the Pope; that would have to be linked to some development (e.g. in internal GOS talks with Spanish church) so that the visit could be characterized as Zapatero coming to discuss those developments with the pope.

Comment

¶ 15. (C) This will be a significant trip for Pope Benedict, as he picks his spots for travel very carefully. In traveling to Spain he has a chance to impact two of his key goals: bolstering the traditional family, and encouraging a traditionally Catholic country to stay true to the faith. Meanwhile, there are some indications that both the Holy See and Spain would welcome a rapprochement in relations; it looks unlikely that any sharp-edged political exchanges will occur during the visit. We look forward to any comments Embassy Madrid may have following the visit.

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